


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

CHARLES ALBERT HALL

LONDON
NEW-CHURCH PRESS, LIMITED
20 HART STREET, W.C.1





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

BY

CHARLES ALBERT HALL

AUTHOR OF

"THE CONQUEST OF CARE," "THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS,"
"THEY DO NOT DIE," "PLANT LIFE," ETC.

LONDON

NEW-CHURCH PRESS, LIMITED

20 HART STREET, W.C.1

1927

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

CHARLES ALBERT HALL

THE HALLS OF THE
NATIONAL SOCIETY OF THE
FRIENDS OF THE LANCET
AND THE LANCET

LONDON
NEW-CHURCH PRESS, LIMITED
25, ABET STREET, W.C.

*Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

I

IN a certain theological discussion which arose out of a demand for a simple creed a correspondent advocated the adoption of the Lord's Prayer not merely as a prayer but as the most simple and yet most complete statement of Christian doctrine. There is wisdom in such advocacy, for the Lord's Prayer is much more than the most perfect of prayers: it is a whole body of theology. Indeed, it is because it is so theologically complete that it is perfect as a prayer. Probably few who repeat the prayer realise its full import. We are so familiar with its terms that we are apt to repeat it formally and glibly and without attempt to appreciate its real inwardness. That with which we are familiar is always in danger of losing its significance. The unusual arrests attention, appeals to the imagination, and arouses thought; whereas we take common things for granted and think

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

little about them. Were we unfamiliar with the Lord's Prayer, and were it suddenly brought to our attention, we should probably think it to be the most arresting utterance we had ever heard: as it is, we treat it as a commonplace, even when we know from instruction something of its spiritual content. Would it not be well to launch a campaign in favour of the majesty and mystery of the commonplace as a counteractive to our undue emphasis upon the glory of the unusual? Of course I am not suggesting that the Lord's Prayer is held in light esteem or that it is treated with the contempt which is said to be born of familiarity: I merely point out a fact which may be recognised by all—it is too generally repeated, not irreverently but unintelligently, as so often happens with words uttered from memory. In some quarters there seems to be no attempt to assess the spiritual value of this most holy formula, and in others it would seem to be repeated almost superstitiously, even as a species of charm or incantation. I propose to give an exposition of the Prayer of prayers in order to elucidate the fact that it is a wonderful theology as well as a glorious aspiration, and that, beyond all, it is a Programme for Life.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

II

IN the Lord's Prayer we have the essence of Christian doctrine in about fifty words. Where, indeed, could we discover a creed more terse and simple? And yet the exposition of so simple a creed might well involve the writing of many big books. We may go too far in our demand for simplicity. We ought not to expect a creed that will release us from the necessity for hard thinking. The chief value of the Lord's Prayer lies not in its mere simplicity but in the almost limitless ideas it suggests. Its words are pregnant, germinal. The formula may be repeated in a few seconds, but a lifetime would not suffice for the full exposition of its spiritual and eternal content. Indeed, we shall never secure a full and final exposition, for the prayer touches infinity itself and deals with matters about which the last word can never be said. Few and simple as the words are, they can never be properly appreciated without interpretation. And the interpreter may approach his subject from many points of view. The present approach will be a practical one: it will, as far as possible, avoid

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

abstruse and speculative philosophisings: I shall take the Prayer in its manward aspect and regard it less as a creed than as a Programme for Life. We shall find it to be more than a series of petitions, more than a statement of theological truth: it is an indication of how man ought to be disposed towards the Lord and His Kingdom and towards his fellows and the universe; it is, moreover, a guide to conduct and a disclosure of the soul's true aspiration. It is the most distinctive thing in the whole Gospel, for it clearly defines Christianity against its dark pagan background.

III

THIS dark background is referred to in the words with which the Lord's Prayer is introduced. "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites, . . . and in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." There are untold ages of ignorance and wretched superstition suggested in the references to the parade of hypocritical piety and use of vain

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

repetitions. Pagans indulged themselves in an orgy of much speaking, not infrequently accompanied by weird incantations and spilling of blood, in order to placate their imaginary gods. Their prayers were based upon an utterly erroneous notion of the Divine nature. Their intention was to placate deities and extract material benefits from them. Their gods were capricious and amenable to flattery, making sport of their devotees after the manner of tyrannical sheiks. Pagan prayer was an effort to propitiate. It is in contrast to such howlings and wailings, to such ignoble ideas of the Divine nature that the Lord gave the Prayer of prayers. By those accustomed to the pagan manner and thought the contrast must have appeared more than striking. Here, indeed, was a prayer such as had never occurred to them—a prayer distinctive and dignified, terse and pointed, in which there was a remarkable absence of fawning flattery and the effort to propitiate, a prayer in which God is approached as “Father,” even as one who is more urgent to bestow than we are to receive. We think we can afford to smile on these ancient pagan crudities as things of a bygone age ; but they are with us still. They exist beyond the pale

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

of Christendom and outside the confines of other religions, affecting the lives and destinies of millions. But that is not the worst aspect of them: the fact most to be deplored is that they appear within Christendom and are either subtly or openly in evidence in the very fanes where the Perfect Prayer is almost daily repeated. It is a sad commentary on current Christianity that the beautiful and dignified statement of truth contained in the Lord's Prayer is not allowed to stand out in bold contrast to paganism. The perfect model of aspiration is not generally copied. The Lord is still addressed in terms of flattery and as a god to be propitiated, and this mainly because so-called Christian thought is vitiated by sacrificial notions utterly foreign to the good news of Jesus Christ.

IV

IF the Lord's Prayer is taken as a brief statement of the Gospel, and if we follow the cue given us in the words which introduce it, and contrast it with paganism, we at once take thought of those things which are conspicuous by their absence in the wonder-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ful formula. We have already noted that there is no attempt at placation by flattery : it is equally as significant that the tripersonal formula does not appear. There is no implied expectation that one Person in the Godhead will confer benefits for the sake of another such Person. There is not the slightest adumbration of the pagan notion which has afflicted Christianity—the notion that God can be appeased by a flow of blood. Neither in the Lord's Prayer nor in any words attributed to the Lord in the Gospels is there a direct or implied doctrine of substitution or faith-alone. Again, we can find in this formula no approach to a vague, undefined theism, and, if I may venture to put it so, there is no crying for the moon, no reaching out to the inarticulate and unattainable. The God approached is the revealed God, realised as the Heavenly Father, and that which is sought after is the Kingdom of God within. It is evident that before Christendom can appreciate the theology of the Lord's Prayer at its true worth it will have to unlearn much, forget much, set aside its prejudices, and study it as a new thing—with a mind to let.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

V

IT is evident that Christians are not expected to be slaves of a formula, even if it be so excellent a one as the Lord's Prayer. The exhortation, "After this manner therefore pray ye," cannot be interpreted as a command to adhere strictly in all prayer to the words that follow. "After this manner" surely means according to the following model and under the enlightenment of its teaching. We must pray with right conceptions of the Divine nature in our minds and with a spiritual end-in-view. We must pray too, as immortal beings with a spiritual destiny, not questing the things which perish but the grace and truth which will add dignity and beauty to immortality. Only once is a seemingly material thing mentioned in the prayer—our daily bread. Even this, when considered in connection with what goes before and what follows, has to be spiritually interpreted. If we always pray or aspire after the manner of the Lord's Prayer, that is with its theology and its programme for life as our guiding principles, we are not likely to go astray in our words: the articulation of our aspirations will harmonise with the inwardness of our convictions.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

VI

THERE is a condition which we must fulfil if we would pray aright and even think aright, and this is indicated in the words, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee." Let us not take these words too literally. The "Inner Chamber" can be found in the place of public worship and even in the market-place, as well as in the privacy of the home. Indeed, this meeting-place with the Lord has no exact location in space and time: it is found only in the topography of the soul. Within each one of us there is a secret place of the Most High, and the Inner Chamber is that region within us which can be flooded with heavenly light by which the truth is revealed. To enter that chamber is to rise to the exaltation of true worship and communion: it involves the attainment of that spiritual state in which we see the glory of the Kingdom, and worship the Father in spirit and in truth. We cannot rise to the height of true prayer or aspiration or to real perception and conviction of truth,


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

unless we gain a state of mind in which we feel we are alone with the Lord and realise that our being is ensphered by the Divine Spirit and rooted in the supernatural. Indeed, apart from this state of mind, we cannot detect the genuine significance of the Lord's Prayer or of any part of the written Word. And when we "enter the chamber" we must be careful to shut the door. This means that by a determination of will we must exclude every desire or thought that would mar the perfection of our vision and inhibit inspiration. It is the guile of self that is the worst enemy to prayer. To pray aright we must above all else close the door on self. It is neither possible nor desirable to rid ourselves of ourselves, for that would mean the extinction of personality; but in prayer self must be relegated to its proper place, the outer court of the mind, and the mind itself must be active only in the spiritual region denominated the Inner Chamber. Once we have attained the state in which alone true prayer is possible we shall evermore know that prayer is not merely asking for things. On the reverse, it is offering ourselves to the Lord that He may have His will of us, and that we may gain light to further His plans.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

Prayer is the outpouring of the soul in a mighty aspiration : it is not a demand but a surrender. And such prayer opens the eyes of the understanding and enables us to have a vision of the glory of the Lord's Kingdom. Surely it is only when we are in the inner chamber with the door closed that we have the spiritual vision which enables us to pray after the manner and thought of the Lord's own model. Under less favourable conditions, with the intrusion of selfish and worldly thoughts, the vision is blurred and the aspiration must needs be imperfect.

VII

HE Inner Chamber, where, according to the instruction of the Sermon on the Mount, we may pray to the Father which is in secret, is no hermit's cell. It is not a building made with human hands but a divinely constructed sanctuary within the soul flooded with a light that never was on land or sea. We enter it when our thoughts and aspirations are engaged with Divine things and when we contemplate the spiritual and eternal order in which our immortal part is


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

rooted. It is not too often that we can escape from the toils of worldly care and action so surely that our whole being is high and lifted up in the contemplation of the everlasting spiritualities. Yet it is only under such a condition that we can enter into the spirit of true prayer. We often "say" our prayers, but how often do we pray? Nor can we take that Inner Chamber by assault: the state in which we can really pray may very wisely be sought after, but it cannot be forcefully induced. If we are sufficiently devout it will come upon us when we least expect it, and when it does come it will be a blessed experience—a moment when we shall feel the Divine presence and realise the Divine purpose. Men and women in the past have so valued the beatific experience that they have tried to induce it by artificial means. They have left the duties of active existence and betaken themselves to the solitudes, foolishly thinking that God can be more readily discovered and enjoyed in loneliness than amid the haunts of men. The one thing they overlook is that the inner chamber has a door, and its door is a means of both entrance and exit. We may enter and be refreshed, but may not stay to become spiritually in-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

toxicated. There is work to be done outside, and our little sojourn in the sanctuary is intended to give us vision and courage with which we may go out to active service and therein be loyal to the truth that has been revealed.

VIII


 HERE is not only sound truth but also a certain winsome quaintness of style in the manner in which the notion of renunciation is dealt with in the writings of Swedenborg. He says, "There are those who believe that it is difficult to live the life which leads to heaven, which is called the spiritual life, because they have heard that one must renounce the world, must divest himself of the lusts called the lusts of the body and the flesh, and must live spiritually. They take this to mean that they must cast away worldly things, which are especially riches and honours ; that they must go continually in pious meditation on God, salvation, and eternal life, and must spend their life in prayers and in reading the Word and pious books. But those who renounce the world and live in the spirit in

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

this way acquire a melancholy life, unreceptive of heavenly joy. To receive the life of heaven a man must by all means live in the world and engage in its duties and affairs, and by a moral and civil life receive the spiritual life." In the same work he continues this theme in these terms: "That it is not so difficult to live the life of heaven, as some believe, may be seen from this: when a matter presents itself to a man which he knows to be dishonest and unjust, but to which he inclines, it is only necessary for him to think that it ought not to be done because it is opposed to the Divine precepts. If a man accustoms himself to think so, and from so doing establishes a habit of so thinking, he is gradually conjoined to heaven. So far as he is conjoined to heaven the higher regions of his mind are opened, and so far as these are opened he sees whatever is dishonest and unjust; and so far as he sees these evils they can be dispersed—for no evil can be dispersed until it is seen."

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE


IX

HESE passages are evidence of sound seership; they enable us to see how the Inner Chamber is entered and what it is for. Man enters that glorious sanctuary when "he is conjoined to heaven and the higher regions of his mind are opened." And the way to secure that conjunction is to resist the evils to which we are inclined because they are opposed to the Divine precepts. If, then, we would enter the Inner Chamber there is but one way of doing it—we must shun evils as sins against God. Shunning evils from a religious motive is the way to the only illumination that is worth while. By hypnotic art and the administration of psychic dope we may induce soul-ravishing ecstasy and spiritual intoxication that have no relation to reality, and which leave us feeble when they are past. But in the real Inner Chamber, which we reach by shunning evils, we find light on life, a calm, undazzling illumination which reveals the way of righteousness, whose work shall be peace and whose effect shall be quietness and confidence for ever. When the higher regions of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

the mind are opened, says the wise Swedenborg, we see whatever is dishonest and unjust, and we detect these evils so that we may shun them and in order that they may be dispersed. This, then, is why we are permitted to discover and enter the quiet and revealing sanctuary; that we may see the truth of God in relation to our common life and in what way our life is not harmonious with the ideal. And it has a practical end-in-view—no less than the determination to make the ideal the real. We can discover the evil to which we are prone only by contrast with revealed truth, and it is for this discovery that the well-disposed, more by the Lord's grace than by deliberate effort, are allowed at certain seasons to enter the Inner Chamber.

X

E enter the Inner Chamber in order to pray: what is prayer? Here, once more, we get a sound answer in the words of Swedenborg. He says, "Prayer, in itself considered, is speech with God. There is then some inward view of the objects of the prayer, and answering to that something like

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

an influx into the perception or thought. That thus there is a kind of opening of the man's interiors towards God, with a difference according to the man's state and according to the object of the prayer. If one prays out of love and faith and only about and for things heavenly and spiritual, then there appears in the prayer something like revelation, which shows itself in the affection of the suppliant, in hope, solace, or an inner gladness." We take it that in defining prayer as "Speech with God" the seer was not thinking of speech as of one man with another. His conception of the Divine nature seems to preclude that. Truly enough, when we are in the Inner Chamber we may employ words, but surely our real converse with the Lord is by means of the language of the soul, of which our poor words are an imperfect articulation. There is silence in the Inner Chamber, but it is a listening silence, in which the voice of God is heard without noise. The speech with God is aspiration, the outpouring of the heart in the desire for light; and the Divine response is the influx of truth which tells us more in a flash of insight than we could explain in years of ordinary speech. True prayer has reference to the spiritualities, and in such prayer

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

there appears "something like revelation." Here is the crux of the whole matter. Revelation in and through prayer made possible by a "kind of opening of man's interiors towards God" is the end of our approach to the Heavenly Father. We pray in order that we may perceive. Our chiefest need is light on life, and we venture to think that we can have revealed to us and detect the real significance and implication of the Lord's Prayer only when we are at our highest, when, in the Inner Chamber, our interiors are open towards God. The Prayer of prayers then is no longer a formula, but truth revealed for the purification of our daily life.

XI

HE who thinks that the inner life is an end in itself, and would fain loiter in the Inner Chamber or betake himself to a hermitage, would do well to consider the mistaken attitude of the impetuous Peter. He entered the Inner Chamber when he was exalted to the Mount of Transfiguration. He was so enamoured of the Vision Glorious, so

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

moved by his experience that he cried, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles: one for thee and one for Moses and one for Elias." But he knew not what he said. He had yet to learn that while inspiration is gained on the mountain, life has to be lived on ordinary levels. It was, indeed, good for him to have his vision and to behold the glory of the Lord—to see him as the fulfilment of law and prophecy; but to dwell evermore in contemplation and ecstasy were insanity. The vision must be translated into action. The disciple, inspired by the disclosures of the Inner Chamber, must go hence and bear the burden and heat of the day, and it is well with him if the vision tarries while he is engaged in the duties of outer life. The vision once seen never loses its influence, although in our business preoccupations it may not be consciously in our thought. Dr John Caird, in one of his notable sermons, very wisely declared: "We cannot in our worldly work be always consciously thinking of religion, yet it is true that unconsciously, insensibly, we may be acting under its ever-present control. As there are laws and powers of the natural world of which, without thinking of them, we are

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ever availing ourselves—as I do not think of gravitation when I move my limbs, or of atmospheric laws when by means of them I breathe—so in the routine of daily work, though comparatively seldom do I think of them, I may yet be constantly swayed by the motives, sustained by the principles, living, breathing, acting in the invisible atmosphere of religion. . . . There may be an under-current beneath the surface-movements of your life—there may dwell in the secret depths of your being the abiding peace of God, the repose of a holy mind, even though, all the while, the restless stir and commotion of worldly business may mark your outer history.” And the same writer said, “Many of the thoughts and motives that most powerfully impel and govern us in the common actions of life are latent thoughts and motives.” It is in the Inner Chamber that we gain the thoughts and motives which, however latent they may become, do most powerfully influence common action.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XII

IT is highly significant that the Sermon which embraces the Lord's Prayer, and which is the programme for the eternal life of man as a spiritual being, with graphic spiritual artistry, is staged on a mountain. "He went up into the mountain: and when he sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them." Spiritually speaking, being on a mountain is equivalent to being in the Inner Chamber: height and inwardness are synonymous. As we only really aspire and become subjects of revelation in the light of the Inner Chamber, so it is only possible for the disciples to be taught of the Lord in His high and holy place. We have to be with Jesus on the high levels or piercing peaks of sublime reverence and exalted love and devotion if we would realise the laws of the Kingdom. The Lord will always speak to us about eternal and vital truth when we rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things. And yet it is equally as significant that after that sweet and revealing converse on the mountain the Lord descended to workaday levels and gave


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

practical demonstration of how the truth of God works in the healing of people. The same healing implies much more than the cure of bodily ills : it portrays the restorative and reconstructive activity of living truth in the body politic, and it is fair to say that no social science can be complete or effective if it ignores the message from the mountain top—the eternal and spiritual law of Sinai and the programme of Christianity uttered on the Galilean hill. No, Jesus was no hermit nor ascetic : at times he retired to a lonely height for prayer, or, on lower reaches, he occasionally sought a quiet haven, such as the house at Bethany, where he sojourned in an atmosphere of love ; but always he returned to the fray. His occasional retirements and his lengthened periods of active service show us clearly enough what should be our attitude to the Inner Chamber. We must enter it to gain fresh vision and new inspiration : we must leave it, however reluctantly, with the determination to translate the vision into reality in our own persons. Milton was right :

“ For solitude sometimes is best society,
And short retirement urges swift return.”

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XIII

ND how essential it is that we should frequently retire to the inner sanctuary if we would retain our vision unimpaired and our life uncontaminated by the coarse contacts of the world, is remarkably well set out by that eighteenth-century divine, Robert Hall. He wrote: "He must know little of the world, and still less of his own heart, who is not aware how difficult it is, amidst the corrupting examples with which it abounds, to maintain the spirit of devotion unimpaired, or to preserve, in their due force and delicacy, those vivid moral impressions, that quick perception of good, and instinctive abhorrence of evil, which form the chief characteristics of a pure and elevated mind. These, like the morning dew, are easily brushed off in the collision of worldly interests, or exhaled by the meridian sun. Hence the necessity of frequent intervals of retirement,—when the mind may recover its scattered powers, and renew its strength by a devout application to the Fountain of all grace." The prophet Haggai, impatient with the Jews who were disinclined to reconstruct the Temple,

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE


exhorted them to "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood and build the house." That stirring exhortation has a wider meaning than Haggai was aware of. In our domestic, private, social, commercial, political, national, and international life we must make a place for God. We shall certainly come to the work empty-handed and unfit if we do not furnish ourselves with the substance of love, reverence, and truth, found only in the mount of holiness, where the plan is revealed and the heart is strengthened for the task. Men spiritualised, or humanised by the Spirit of the Lord, are the only reliable Temple-builders. Quoth Edwin Markham :—

" We are all blind until we see
That in the human plan
Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man.

Why build those cities glorious
If man unbuilt goes ?
In vain we build the work unless
The builder also grows."

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE


XIV

GAINST the background of the vain repetitions of the heathen, and against the belief in a host of imaginary gods which those repetitions imply, the opening sentence of the Lord's Prayer stands out in striking and almost dazzling contrast. A new, distinctive note is struck. Long before the Incarnation men had arisen who had timidly dallied with the idea of God as Father, but it is only in the good news of Christianity that it is announced with confident assurance. Moses stood for the God of Law, and Amos declared the Divine Justice. Isaiah once spoke of the Everlasting Father, but it is doubtful if he realised the universality of His love. After a very tragic matrimonial experience the thought came to Hosea that God would be kind to Israel if it were sufficiently penitent: but Hosea was thinking of a local God, the lover of a chosen few. Until the Christian era, the Hebrew people had never properly outgrown the notion of a tribal God. The idea of the Lord as "Our Father" is the gift of Christianity not only to Christians but also

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

to the whole human race. It is the supreme and unique revelation of the New Testament. As Bruce Barton, the gifted author of a remarkable book, "The Man Nobody Knows," says, "That was the message of Jesus—that God is supremely better than anybody had ever dared to believe. Not a petulant Creator, who had lost control of his creation and, in wrath, was determined to destroy it all. Not a stern Judge, dispensing impersonal justice. Not a vain King who must be flattered and bribed into concessions of mercy. Not a rigid Accountant, checking up the sins against the penances and striking a cold hard balance. Not any of these . . . nothing like these . . . but a great Companion, a wonderful Friend, a kindly, indulgent, joy-loving Father.

XV

HE word "Our" with which the wonderful Prayer begins is comprehensive. It does not refer to a God about whom the Jews could set a ring-fence. It embraces Jew and Gentile—the whole of Humanity. Some Christians have thought to limit the salvation of the Heavenly Father to so-called Christian believers, but not so the Proclaimer

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

of the good news. We are not left in any doubt on this point, for it is definitely said that the Father which is in heaven "Maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." The Fatherhood of God implies the brotherhood not of some men but of all men. Our Father is the God to whom all may turn with confidence, and His Kingdom is to include all peoples, those who come from the north and the south, from the east and the west, as well as from Judea or Christendom. We fear Amos would have favoured the Elder Brother in the parable rather than the Prodigal: the Lord Jesus did not overlook the merits of the complaining brother, but his main aim was to show that the penitent prodigal is ever lovingly received, that there is joy in heaven over the sinner that repenteth. He is not reminded of a past that is gone beyond recall, not scolded for ancient misdeeds: there is no rod laid in pickle for him. He has sinned and has paid for his sin; it is even realised that he may continue to pay. But there is the disposition to forget the past in the change of heart and the hope of a nobler future. The Lord does not say to the penitent, You have been a terrible sinner and so are beyond

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

the pale, but rather, I have always loved you with an everlasting love : and at last my love has drawn you home. You needed me even when you forgot me, and my love followed you in all your wanderings. I let you go with a sigh : I welcomed you home with a smile. I was never angry with you . . . I was sorry you had to suffer . . . but that was the only way. . . . Now your heart is changed and you have come to yourself, let us forget what cannot be altered. . . . And do you go forward heroically with the new life. Never before had a prophet or teacher spoken in such terms. The Father represented in the priceless Parable of the Prodigal Son is uniquely the God of Christianity. And He is OUR Father.

XVI



OF course, the outstanding characteristic of the Heavenly Father is love. You may say that God is our Father or that God is Love and mean the same thing. But love is nothing apart from the lover, and when we think of the Lord as Father we are saved from the danger of devotion to a nebulous abstraction. We need to realise


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

that God is love : that is clear enough : but to fully appreciate that love it must be seen by us as active in the personality of the Supreme Lover. The term Father implies love in action, love which works and can be felt and responded to. The only love which we can appreciate is that which is extended to us by one who loves us. The Lord's Prayer does not encourage a vague theism : it is addressed to One who is revealed and with whom we may enter into the most sacred intimacy. That there is a depth of love in the Infinite God which none of us can fathom, we have no doubt : but in addressing ourselves to the Father in the heavens, we converse with a Lover who discloses all we can ever realise about the Infinite Love. For, mark you, it is not to a God above the heavens that we are exhorted to pray but to a Father IN the heavens. This makes a vast difference. It is the difference between that Lord as we can never know Him, and the Lord as He may be known. It must be understood that the Father is not the God of a geocentric heaven, and that the heaven referred to is not out yonder in stellar space ! The heavens are those projected from the characters of heavenly disposed persons. They exist outwardly to

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

them because they have been begotten inwardly in their hearts. Apart from the heavenliness which characterises regenerated people there can be no heaven. The Kingdom is primarily within us. We must remember that the Lord told His disciples so, if we are to understand what He means by the heavens where the Father is known. In a word, the Father in the heavens is the Divine Love as it appears in the characters, the affections, thoughts, and actions of the inhabitants of the heavens. We worship the Father who reveals His Fatherliness in the loving activities of heavenly life. Hosea got very close to an understanding of that love when he saw a reflection of it in the love in his own heart—that love which welcomed home an errant, sin-stained wife: it seems a pity that he could not see it in a wider application.

XVII

O the Father addressed in the Lord's Prayer is the Divine Love which is the life and substance of all heavenly love. We need never say we cannot know the Father so long as there is worthy love

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

in the world. The Divine Love is revealed in, and also is the inspiration of the love which constitutes motherhood and fatherhood. It is revealed in self-sacrifice, charity, and in all tender regard for man and beast. The Father has disclosed Himself throughout the ages wherever men and women have done beautiful things from a religious motive. There never has been a time in the history of mankind when heavenliness could not be developed, when heavenly loves could not be practised. And the Father was in all that heavenliness, though not discerned. He never was fully discerned until revealed by him who is heavenliness itself, even Jesus Christ. In the term "Our Father" we have the articulation in clear and pregnant phrase of the vague perceivings and dim glimmers of the inner light which have ever been experienced by men who have stretched out their hands to God in the darkness. And what a help it is to us to realise that heavenliness is heaven! That, surely, brings us very close to the Father who is the life and inspiration of it all, and without whom it could not be. And it reminds us that death as ordinarily understood has nothing to do with the matter. We do not need to die in order to be in heaven,

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

for we are already in heaven when we are heavenly. And we are heavenly when we love Him who is Love, and our love of Him, and His love in us, goes out in selfless service to our fellows. The Father is in that service, for it, too, is heaven! We may perceive the Divine Love in heavenliness here and now every whit as clearly as after death. The Father in the heavens is the Divine Love whom everybody may know and by whom everybody wittingly or unwittingly benefits.

XVIII

WE wonder if men would ever have discerned God with any degree of clarity if Jesus had not articulated Him in the phrase, "Our Father." But the matter of supreme interest is that the Lord did not rest content with giving us a term by which we might describe God: he did far better than that, for he revealed the Father in his own person! Paul might well say that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily. Without doubt, God Himself appeared in Jesus, and in that embodiment came closer to the apprehension of man than


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ever before. We talk of the Father, the Divine Love, being present in heavenliness, but where before or since has there been such heavenliness as that exhibited in Jesus? He was and still is heavenliness itself. Nay, He is heaven, for it is his spirit which engenders the heavenliness that is heaven. The love in Jesus is Divine Love. If we regard Jesus not merely as the son of Mary, but as the personification of Divine Love, we see how rightly Philip was answered. "If ye had known me," said the Lord, "ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him." Philip saith unto him, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus saith unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" It was no ordinary self-regarding human love, but Divine Love that in Jesus yearned for the salvation of mankind, that deplored the recalcitrance of Jerusalem, that entered into the joys and sorrows of simple folk, that gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and activity to the lame. It was Divine Love which expressed itself in the teaching of truth that

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

made men's hearts to burn within them. It was not despair born of failure, but a love that yearned even over enemies ; such love as only the Father is capable of, that besought forgiveness for an ignorant, jeering rabble. The Divine Humanity is the Supreme Heaven in which the Father is the very soul. It is not sufficient to recognise God in such poor heavenliness as we may exhibit : we must look beyond that to the Living Lord in whom the Father dwells, whose Spirit makes heaven, and without whom heaven could barely be a dream.

XIX


HUS we have advanced a little in our appreciation of the Lord's Prayer as a whole body of theology. The first consideration in theology is God Himself, and the Christian theology, so tersely phrased in the Prayer of prayers, right at the outset directs us to the God who is known and shows us how He is known. We detect the Father in the heavens in the person of him who taught us how to pray aright. We see that the love that is in the Lord is identical with

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

the Divine Love which is called the Father. And we realise that all the heavens, and the heavenliness which has begotten them, as well as all worthy love and service that make heaven here on earth, are the expression, the bodying forth of Him who is the soul of all things good and true, and who is so near to us that in Him we live and move and have our being. This understanding that our heavenliness is inspired by Him who alone is love and goodness is not only the first thing in our Christian theology ; it is also the first thing in the Programme for Life. It conduces to that humility and reverence which are supremely needful if we would render service to the glory of Him without whose Spirit we can do nothing that is worth while. There can be no self-glorification when we know that our being is rooted in the Divine. We often mistake fussy, self-regarding activity for Christianity, and wonder why men are not favourably impressed by it. It is only the Lord's activity in us and through us that counts, and compels the admiration, if not the love of mankind.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XX

HE simplicity and perfection of the Lord's Prayer as a whole body of Christian theology begin to dawn on us when we interpret the opening sentence in the light of the Lord's own teaching. The Father is the Divine Love portrayed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son—a Father who is kind toward the unthankful and the evil, and who is merciful to the uttermost. "Heaven" primarily is the heavenliness which produces heavenly conditions; and the Father in heaven is the Divine Love which is the life and soul of heavenliness. Setting aside all vain philosophisings and metaphysical speculations, the Prayer introduces us to the known God, or, at any rate, to the God who may be known and loved by all who worthily approach Him. We are not confronted with a problem, but with a certainty. We are not asked to follow a complicated and confusing argument, but a fact is set before us for recognition. If God cannot be seen in Jesus, where may we see Him? Was not Divine Love, the Father, in him as soul and body? "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." "The Father abiding in me doeth his works." The works of love are the supreme and only compelling argument for the existence of God, and looking to Jesus we see Divine Love at work! In Jesus we behold the Father in the heavens! Moreover, the Father is revealed in all the spiritualities in man which are born of the Spirit of the Lord, and, very impressively, in the life of service actuated by heavenly grace. In the wonderful glimpses of heaven given in the writings of Swedenborg we detect the Divine Love in operation in and through the minds of regenerated men and women: this is the Father portrayed in the Lord's Prayer. We cannot but be astounded at the obtuseness of folk who ask for evidence for God when all the time He is to be discerned, not only in Jesus Christ or in the heaven beyond, but in the heavenliness of men inspired by Him. Like Philip of old, you ask us to show you the Father, my friend. Why do you not open your eyes and see for yourself? He is here in every heavenly quality which man displays on earth: in the spirit and deed of brotherhood, in all truth and righteousness, in all mercy and kindness, in the sweet chari-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ties that spring from a wise and understanding heart. Wherever a man is inspired by Divine Love, there is the Father in His heaven.

XXI

NE marvels at the simplicity and self-evidence of this doctrine. It is the doctrine of God resident in heavenliness and revealed thereby. We ought not to let any questionings or speculations divert our thoughts from the only secure and incontestable knowledge of God that is available. And we have to remember that this doctrine is more than a creed: it is the first item in the Christian's Programme for Life. It is possible for one to say that the doctrine is reasonable and to enthusiastically shout it from the house-tops without being thereby morally advantaged. The belief must become a conviction, and the conviction must beget a life. Man's behaviour is determined by his attitude to life and the principles which govern it, and the conviction of God, recognised as the Father and Begetter of all good, creates an attitude that makes a big difference. It kills self-assertion and love of the

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

limelight ; it destroys worldly diplomacy and the desire for reward. It creates simplicity of heart, singleness of purpose. It clarifies thought. The man who knows in his heart that God is present in goodness, truth, and righteousness feels His nearness and stands in awe of Him. He is moved with a determination to so order his life that the Lord shall appear in it. He is an outstanding witness to the fact that no social programme, however seemingly ideal, is workable if it is not operated by humble and worshipful men animated by spiritual vision and religious devotion. Let the Father in the heavens, the Divine Love so variously portrayed in the Gospels, be the inspiration of all human endeavour, and the humbly recognised life of all goodness, and the world would be a happier, sweeter place to live in !

XXII

INCIDENTALLY, our interpretation of the Father in the heavens throws a flood of light upon a passage in the Sermon on the Mount which has baffled expositors. Jesus said, " Be ye therefore per-


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

fect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." How may we dare to hope for such perfection? Surely here is an impossible demand! But it is not so impossible as it at first appears. The perfection at which we are to aim is not the perfection of the Lord Himself, but that which He produces in heaven. It is the perfection of God exhibited in heavenly character. We may call it angelic perfection, especially if we think of angels as men and women who love the Lord and serve Him in the uses of His Kingdom. The only real distinction between an angel and a very ordinary man is that the angel works in all things as the servant of God, and the ordinary man as the servant of self. We have a clear indication of how we can respond to the Lord's counsel of perfection in the preceding verses. We become children of the Heavenly Father, the product of His perfect love, and exhibit His perfection, when, from the heart, we obey His behest, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." The Father is perfect love because He is no respecter of persons, and "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

rain on the just and on the unjust." Strict impartiality in love is the Divine Perfection, and our lives are perfected in heavenliness when we can look for and love the actual or potential good in all human beings irrespective of race, language, or creed, or even of any seeming injury imposed upon us. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us: hereby know we that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

XXIII

HE first clause of the simple theology which is the Lord's Prayer concerns the Knowable God and focuses thought upon the Divine Love which is the life and soul of all spirituality and religious action. The second follows in orderly sequence. It refers to the holy awe and the intelligent reverence fundamental to Christian life. "Hallowed be thy name!" True knowledge of the Father, who was the very soul of Jesus, must needs beget reverence. It has been said that knowledge kills reverence, that awe can flourish only in an atmosphere

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

of mystery. Superstitious awe may mark the ignorant, but surely spiritual awe is an accompaniment of knowledge. He who is really wise in matters of knowledge is ever affected by the wonder and mystery of what he knows. It is a cheap, superficial learning that is satisfied with a fact and concludes that there is no more to it. In everything known there is the soul of the unknown and the manifestation of invisible things. In accommodation to our finiteness, the Father appears in Jesus, thereby disclosing Himself sufficiently for us to grasp the fact that He is Love ; but back of this disclosure is the mystery of infinity. Even when we understand that God appears in godliness, the mystery of godliness remains. With all our knowledge of God in Christ we know only in part, and what we do not know keeps us questing and maintains the sense of wonder which is associated with reverence. We bow our heads before a revelation not only because it adds to our knowledge of spiritual things, but also because it has hidden implications. If knowledge of the Heavenly Father does not beget reverence for His holy name, it leads nowhere ; we are left at a standstill. But if we are moved with awe by knowledge of holy

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

things our minds are softened and rendered submissive: they are disposed to co-operate with the truth. Swedenborg asks, "Can there be shame without reverence?" The answer, of course, is in the negative. Surely it is reverence for the Lord and everything by which He is known which makes us ashamed of our selfishness and our failure to square with His good purpose for us. Without reverence there can be no Christian life. And this reverence will show itself in more than pious acts: it will betray itself in all the common deeds of life. It will restrain us when we are tempted to do wrong, and it will support us in the ways of right thinking and living.

XXIV

NOT the least feature of the perfection of the Lord's Prayer is the fact that it not only calls for reverence as a leading and essential characteristic of Christian life, but it clearly indicates that which is to be revered. We are to hallow the Lord's name, which is no less than the name of the Heavenly Father. In this connection we have to decide what His name really is, so

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

that we may reverence it aright. God is known to men under many names ; indeed His name, as ordinarily understood, is as various as human languages are diverse. By whatever linguistic name He is known to us, we ought to hold that name in awe and employ it with a sense of its significance. We do ourselves grave injury when we introduce the name of God into profane speech. But despite the hundreds of names men have given to God for purposes of description or speech, there must be aspects of the Divine nature by which God is known everywhere. This thought leads us to the understanding that the real name of God, that by which He is known to all men, despite diversities of tongue, is something above etymology : it is more than the label we attach to folk for purposes of social or legal identification. We come nearer to the meaning of the Name of God when we think of " Name " in the sense of character or reputation. When we talk of having a " good name " we are not thinking of a combination of baptismal and surname, but of our fair repute in the eyes of men. " A good name endureth for ever," says the writer of Ecclesiasticus, and we realise that the reference is not to an enduring linguistic


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

tag, but to the immortality of sound character. Chrysostom said, "It is not names which give confidence in things, but things which give confidence in names." We have confidence in the Lord Jesus, not because we call him Jesus, but because that name conjures up the thought of what he is. His nature gives significance to his Name. To him we might rightly apply the lines of Southey :—

"A name which you all know by sight very well,
But which no one can speak, and no one can spell."

Who, indeed, can frame in words or set down in writing the real inwardness of the personality of him we call Jesus?

XXV

O, the name of the Heavenly Father is not a mere "Our Father," but it is the character in which He appears and by which He is recognised. We know Him supremely in the Divine Humanity of Jesus Christ, and that humanity, which we can all appreciate, is the name to be hallowed. The Father in Jesus revealed love, mercy, tenderness, power over evil, strength of pur-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

pose, graciousness, justice, truth, and goodwill. All these Divine qualities, and many more, are embraced in the name of the Lord and by them He is known. When we reverence whatever He begets we hallow His name. Referring to the aspiration, "Hallowed be thy name," Swedenborg says, "By name here is not meant the name, but all the things of love and faith; for these are the Lord's, and these are from Him." All the heavenliness or spirituality of regenerated men and women is the Name of the Father. It is so because it is the product of His love and the evidence of His being. We hallow the Lord's name when we stand in reverence before the good, the true, and the beautiful. We hallow His supreme quality, the Divine Love, which constitutes His Fatherhood, when we reverence heaven-born love wheresoever and in whomsoever it is manifested. We recognise God in spiritual law, and when we hold that law in reverence we hallow His name. The writer of the Book of Revelation presents an appealing picture of the great multitude of the redeemed, and declares that the Father's name is written in their foreheads. This does not mean that they are outwardly branded with God's literal name, but that the love of the Lord and the

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

service of His Kingdom are the distinguishing marks of their character. The nature of the Father is writ large upon the character of the man who has surrendered to His gracious influence.

XXVI

THUS the Father has a name, independently of language, by which He is known to all men of good will, no matter what their race, colour, speech, culture, or religion. His real name is love, goodness, wisdom, charity, loyalty to truth, graciousness, and forbearance. In reverencing any heavenly and worth-while quality or principle we are reverencing Him. The Lord's Prayer erects no creedal barriers: it says to the Jew or Gentile, to men everywhere, Set aside your superstitions, leave speculation alone: here and there in men you see goodness, unselfish and spontaneous: well, God is in that goodness: reverence it and you hallow the name of the Father, that by which He is in evidence. This, surely, is not vague metaphysics or abstract theism: it is more than theology: it is a Programme for Life. The qualities revered are more practically hallowed when

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

they are embodied in action. It is futile to prate about an unknown God so long as goodness appears in the disposition of man. Yet it is not well with us if we deem goodness to be our own: indeed, it loses its religious value if it is not ascribed to the Lord alone.

XXVII

WHEN in our hearts we perceive the inherent loveliness of a thing we cannot rest satisfied with the adoration of it. Beauty moves us and begets the desire to make it ours. The Lord's Prayer indicates that the religious life begins with recognition and acknowledgment of the Heavenly Father as revealed in heavenly qualities of character, and at once follows on to the reverence suggested by "Hallowed be thy name." But reverence, though essential to religion, is not its end. If our spiritual life halts at reverence it will have no basis in fact: we shall be like men who worship from afar and make no attempt to embrace the object of our devotion. True worship of the Lord begets the love of Him, and love of Him will not be content until we are conjoined with

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

Him and our whole nature is transformed by His living Spirit. Hence, in the sequence of the wonderful prayer, the petition, "Hallowed by thy Name," is immediately followed by the demand, "Thy kingdom come." This is sound psychology: we desire what we admire. And it has a practical issue, for it implicitly warns us that a life of contemplative piety is not enough. Religion has not fulfilled its purpose until it has transformed us in deed as well as in heart and thought.

XXVIII

IT is a little unfortunate that we are apt to give the word "Kingdom" a merely political significance. When we employ it in spiritual connections we must always remember that the Lord's Kingdom is "not of this world," that is of a worldly order. It comes not with outward pomp and glory; it cannot be forced on us by legal enactment: nor can it be imposed by power of arms. There is only one sense in which it is established by conquest, and that is when it overthrows the evil in our hearts and wins our loving obedience to its laws. Too

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

many folk are engaged in the vain endeavour to take the Kingdom by force and to impose it from without. They do right to desire a fairer and saner social order, but they fail in their efforts because they do not seem to realise that the Kingdom must be in the soul of a man before he can be in the Kingdom. The Kingdom, indeed, is the Lord's Spiritual Order, and it must reign within before it can be manifested without. We observe that Dr Moffatt, in his translation of the New Testament, renders the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come," in the words, "Thy Reign begin." There is justification for this rendering, and although it does not appeal to our sense of euphony so well as the original rendering, it does clearly suggest that the Kingdom required by the man of religion is the reign of the Lord in the hearts and thence in the affairs of men.

XXIX

BUT the significance of the Kingdom is clearer to us in the light of our discussion of the earlier part of the Lord's Prayer. The Kingdom prayed for is obviously the Kingdom of the Father who is addressed


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

at the beginning, and who is referred to throughout the prayer. It is not the reign of the Unknown God, nor of a pagan god rendered complacent by the propitiatory offerings of fawning and servile subjects. On the reverse, it is the reign of the Father in the heavens, that is of the Divine Love as it appears in the heavenliness of regenerated men and women, both on earth and in heaven. We are to reverence the Name of the Father, and this, as we have seen, is the heavenliness in which the Father is known to us and which is begotten by His Spirit. And we are to desire the reign of the Father in and through heavenly affections and characteristics. And when we ask that the reign of the Father be established we really do more than pray that we and all men may be governed by the Divine Love: we also seek for His Name to be written in our hearts. This, of course, means that the spiritual qualities which the Father produces and in which He appears are sought after. So all who understand aright, when they pray, "Thy Kingdom come," are expressing an earnest desire that the Divine Love may rule heart, thought, and act, and may express itself in truth, goodness, mercy, charity, goodwill, beauty of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

soul, in elevated thought and in every good of human life which is heaven within and which is born of the love of the Lord. A line is drawn between that which is of Divine origin and what is native to man. The suppliant should know that there is a distinction between the life tainted by self and the life of the Kingdom. The quest of the Kingdom implies that the seeker wishes heavenly loves and qualities to displace self-love and all its activities.

XXX

ND there is a world of thought in that single word "come." It suggests at once that the Kingdom is really to come and that it is a Divine product in human character. It is not with us by birth but by regeneration. It cannot enter fully into our lives until Self is deposed. We are at first of the earth, earthy, and it is only by a new birth, and by progress in the regenerate life, that we become of the heavens, heavenly. Although heaven is not geographically located, and although spiritual things are not measurable by earthly standards, it is difficult for us to describe heaven or the Kingdom except by


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

words which imply elevation. And the word "come," used in reference to the Kingdom, quite happily gives the suggestion that it is something good and great to which we may uplift the eye of our mind : something above us that is most desirable, and something which, under right conditions, may descend upon us and rest within us. Swedenborg would say, in this connection, that the Kingdom "flows" into us, and this suggests a stream of heavenly life flooding our souls and filling them with its divine energy and reconstructive power. We are reminded of the true Eden—the Garden of God in the soul—watered by the river, the Divine Love and Wisdom, which, welling up in the centre of our being, proceeds thence and nourishes every part of our nature : and also of "the river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The latter is no ordinary stream : it is the Divine Influence, the Holy Spirit, which nourishes and keeps in life the activities and qualities of the Kingdom. And the word "come" further directs our thought to the fact that the spiritual qualities which are the realm of the Lord, and by which He rules, are intended to vitally affect human life and

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

institutions. They are not to be regarded as unattainable : they are not to be looked upon as lovely but impracticable ideals. We are to bring them to earth by the ardent aspiration of the soul and give them solid embodiment in human action. We cry " Thy kingdom come " in vain if we do not intend to obey its laws. And it is futile for us to pray that the Divine Love may reign if we have a contempt for our fellow-men, harbour resentment against any, and are ever ready to take offence.

XXXI

O the Lord's Prayer directs us to reverence the heavenly qualities in which the Lord appears and which are part and lot of His Kingdom : and it enjoins us to desire them as the ruling influence in our lives. When love, goodness, brotherliness, justice, righteousness, purity of heart, truth, mercy, and all imaginable heavenly qualities dominate our lives, so long as they are regarded as the good gift of God, the Kingdom, for us, has come. And through us that Kingdom will be extended. Here, once more, we see the Lord's Prayer as a Programme for Life,

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE


and a very practical programme at that. Surely it is not beyond the bounds of practicality for every human being, if he will, to accept and cultivate the life of the Kingdom ! It is not an impossible counsel of perfection that we have before us, but simply the suggestion that we may resolve our problems and discover peace by submitting to the rule of Love. Love of the Lord and love of the neighbour ultimated in the Golden Rule is the only sane way of life. We are always trying other ways, but with no success. It seems as if we shall have to fail and fail, and yet fail again, ere we realise that the Lord's way is best. And yet how demonstrably simple it is ! We have heard of agitators in trade disputes, in the heat of their fight, saying to all intents and purposes that they are out for material gains, and showing resentment against those who speak of the love of the neighbour and service to the country. Without disparaging any just demand for material gain, we are obliged to point out that there can be no true justice without love, and no fair social order in the absence of brotherly service. If all men cultivated the graces of the Kingdom and had charity towards their fellows there would be no trade

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

disputes. If all men were actuated by the spirit of mercy, there would be no need for laws against cruelty. If mutual love were universal there would be no war. Men would not lie and hate and steal if they lived under the Lordship of Jesus. With the coming of the Kingdom into the hearts of men, this world would be a fair and beautiful place to live in. All that now troubles us, in the final analysis, can be traced back to human selfishness, and the only cure for selfishness, and, therefore, the only solvent for our troubles, is the Divine Love, the Heavenly Father expressed in brotherliness, and the will to serve the common good. Merely external reforms are of little avail. The only effective reform is that which springs from conviction and the will for betterment. We prate about practical politics, but what do they achieve? What can they achieve apart from the graces of the Kingdom? The Lord's Prayer is the only practical politic, and, alas! it is commonly ignored as a Programme for Life.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XXXII

HE Kingdom specifically pointed to in the Lord's Prayer is the governance of the Divine Love as it appears in our love of goodness, truth, and righteousness: the domain of that Kingdom is the entire human mind and the practical activities which proceed from it. We rightly look for the general appearing of the Kingdom, but we have to remember that "it cometh not with observation." It is not an Order which can be forced upon mankind by external authority: it grows in the soul of man: its outer manifestation follows from its inner realisation and power. The teaching of the Lord is plainly that he who desires betterment must BE better. Utopian schemes which do not allow for the human equation can never become practical politics. A perfect social order thrust upon society to-day would to-morrow be vitiated by the unregenerate activities of selfish schemers. Without the new heart of grace and the new spirit of truth in the individual man, we cannot expect ideal social progress. Mass-reform is desirable, but impossible, apart from the reform of the units

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

composing the mass. So Christianity concentrates on the individual, and its mass results are to be looked for mainly in that spiritual and eternal realm of which our earthly life is but the portal. By all means let us have the Kingdom here and now : let our earthly laws express heavenly laws and even serve to restrain the activities of the wicked self-seeking schemers ; yet the makers and upholders of such laws must be men after the Lord's own heart. So it is men and their regeneration that we have to consider, first, last, and all the time. And it is not enough to yearn for the Kingdom, as indicated in the petition, " Thy Kingdom come." Such yearning is good, but it will remain ineffectual if it does not lead to action. There is something to be done, and that is the will of the Heavenly Father. The longing for the Kingdom is illuminated by the realisation that it can come only as men on earth follow the will of God as perfectly as it is followed by regenerated men and women in heaven. And here is a recognition of earthly factors which are antagonistic to heavenly developments. The native selfishness of the worldly man is hostile to heavenly altruism. The heavenly loves of the Lord and the neighbour are opposed by the

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

loves of self and the world. This antagonism is not in the Divine scheme: it has grown out of the abuse of the freedom divinely bestowed upon man. Selfishness has become an ingrained and inherited disposition; it has to be displaced by the virtues and graces of the Kingdom, and our part in the displacement consists in shunning all recognised evils as sins against God. We do not truly pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth," unless we really wish our selfishness to be ousted by a heavenly manhood. And our wish must be translated into such action as will tend to bring us into harmony with the Divine will.

XXXIII

BUT what is the Divine will? This is a matter about which we need to think clearly. And it is best for us to think about it in terms of the Christian evangel. Surely the Divine will is indicated in words spoken by the Lord to his disciples, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." In all things, through all things, come weal, come

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

woe, there is the one great purpose of the Lord in creation, and this is no less than the giving of the Kingdom: the governance of the Divine Love in the will, thought, and action of men. This involves the spiritualisation, and, therefore, the sound humanisation of the human race. It means more, for spiritually human beings act together, consciously or unconsciously, as a heavenly association: they constitute a heaven. So we see the truth of Swedenborg's pregnant assertion that the end of creation is a heaven from the human race. Under the Divine Providence, all things are overruled or rendered subservient to this wonderful issue. We might even describe the Lord as relentless in this one great purpose. He never deviates from it. All our perplexities and discomforts arise from our ignorant or determined failure to fall in with it. Our lives and conditions can be happy only in so far as we recognise and submit to this stream of tendency. It is useless for us to think of the Divine will in any other connection. This means that we have to set aside ancient notions. Folk used to talk as if sorrow, pain, bitter experience, human loss, wealth, or poverty were impositions of the will of an arbitrary Deity. Men

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

and women, tortured with pain and broken hearts, have cried, "Thy will be done," as if it were God's will that men should suffer. Discomfort and pain due to the ignorance, irreligion, and malignancy of men were looked upon as Divine visitations. It is not the will of the Lord that any should be in pain. Life's effort is not to probe a wound, but to heal it. The Divine will acts in mitigation of evils that are foreign to it. The evils that man has introduced into the scheme of existence are subordinated to the purpose of God. When we pray, "Thy will be done," we should not think of our troubles as being divinely ordained, but remember that it is the will of the Lord to establish His Kingdom within us despite the troubles, or possibly through their agency. We are well advanced in our appreciation of the Lord's Prayer as a Programme for Life, when we understand that the Heavenly Father has one undeviating purpose, the governance of Love, and that it is our wisdom to submit to it.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XXXIV

WE get into most intimate contact with our theme, however, when we recognise the real inwardness of heaven, where the will of the Father is done, and the significance of the earth which must be brought into harmony with heaven. The heaven is the spiritual man in us, constituted by spiritual affections and thoughts : it is the realm of the ideal in the soul of man. The earth is the "natural" man in us which is disposed to be wayward and antagonistic to heavenliness : it is the seat of self, and therein reside all our inherited tendencies to evil. Our life has its upward gaze through which it contemplates spiritual things, and its outward vision through which it regards external things. Heaven is potential in our spiritual part—in its ideals and spiritual aspirations—it becomes actual when, through natural or earthly activity, its ideal sentiments become the deeds of love. To put it otherwise : the Father's will is done in us and by us when our earthly or natural activity is sublimated by the ideals of the Kingdom, and becomes expressive of its spirit. In each of us earth and heaven

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

should be harmonious with the will and purpose of the Lord. And let it be noted that the "earth" in this connection is not a thing of earth which will perish with the dissolution of our material bodies: it is the outer and personal aspect of the immortal spirit. It will endure for ever. Without it we could not be free and enduring personalities. Through all time and in eternity the heaven of sentiment will demand outer expression if it is to be a real thing. It is the eternal law that goodness can have no real existence except in a good life; that truth will remain an abstraction until it is embodied in a deed. Through all existence we shall have a lower nature essential to our being, and there will never come a condition when we shall be so perfect as not to need to pray, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon earth." Any perfection that we may aspire to cannot be absolute or final: it must needs be progressive. Always there will be disclosures of finer heavenliness, and as these become real in action, we shall behold higher potentialities for our adoption. That is the glory of the Kingdom: it never becomes "flat, stale and unprofitable": always there is the advancing ideal and increasing revelation; always the

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

joy of never-ending accomplishment. In the light of these considerations, the words of the Lord, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," assume a significance denied to them by certain cunning ecclesiastics. They imply that only that which has been firmly established in natural activity can have any enduring spiritual quality. When the heaven of our aspirations has become a fact in life, it is founded on a rock, and will withstand all the powers of hell that may rage against it.

XXXV

IF we are to do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven, we most certainly need special strength for the effort. The feat is not to be accomplished by the exercise of the will of the flesh fortified by ordinary worldly ambition. It is in the conversion of heavenly sentiment and spiritual ideals into deeds of love that we discover the antagonism of self-love and customs to which we have become habituated. The will of the Heavenly Father is that we may be regenerated; that we may become new men and

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

women in Christ Jesus: new not only in thought and desire, but also new in action. The Christianity which remains a mere diagram of faith or a mystical dissipation cannot, of itself, achieve a harmony of earth with heaven. The faith must display itself in conduct, the belief must be fruitful in righteous and orderly deeds. Under the illumination of heavenly ideals and practices we are enabled to detect the fact that our earthly conceptions of existence are fallacious, and that our deeds, no matter how seemingly good, are marred by self-seeking and the desire for reward. We discover that a heavenly principle demands that we should serve the common good, not primarily for merit or pay, but in an unselfish spirit of service. It has been revealed to us that we best serve our fellows by getting into line with the Divine purpose, which, as we have seen, has respect to the spiritualisation of manhood. All this involves an entire change of attitude and the display of a new spirit: it, in fact, calls for new life. The heavenly light shows us what poor creatures we are and gives us an insight into the nature of the change that is called for. We are almost appalled by the discovery. We feel that we

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

are so far short of what we ought to be and that such a revolution in desire, thought, and conduct is needed that we almost despair of accomplishing the necessary harmony with heaven. How is it possible that the love of self and the love of the world, so strongly entrenched, can be displaced by the love of the Lord and the love of the neighbour? Of ourselves, and on an ordinary diet, we are not sufficient for the task. It is clear that if we are to live as angels on earth we must be fed with angels' food and discover a source of strength which will equip us for the inevitable conflict between our earthly selves and our heavenly aspirations.

XXXVI

IT is a further evidence of the perfection of the Lord's Prayer, that the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," immediately follows "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth." It is a perfect psychological sequence. When we realise that the law of love as followed in heaven should also be obeyed by us on earth, and that the programme of Christianity

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

insists that our natural man should be harmonised with the life of heaven, we at once want to know how it is to be done, and our thoughts turn to ways and means. We are not left without guidance. We cannot accomplish our correspondence with heaven by feeding our souls on natural goodness, which is tinctured with self and demands applause for every good deed, and would fail to operate in the absence of an audience. For a heavenly task we need heavenly bread. The diet of goodness which we show in common good nature, and the inspiration of vulgar worldly thought are altogether inadequate: we have to turn our eyes to the heavens and note how heavenly men and women are nourished. We find that they do not depend upon goodness which they might deem peculiarly their own: they realise that of themselves they can do no good thing, and that "Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." The heavenly man does not say, "I am good," the very thought would vitiate his heavenliness: but he asserts that the Lord alone is good, and that it is by His goodness that all good deeds

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

are done. Such a man does not flatter himself that he does good, or even that he has power to do good. He simply opens his soul to the Divine Spirit and thus receives an inspiration and a strength that are not his own. At the same time he does not surrender his own initiative. He acts "as of himself," but always with the acknowledgment that the Lord acts with and by him. He does not "lose himself in God," but in lending his faculties to Divine inspiration he finds his true self and the way in which he can be subordinated to the Divine purpose. His cry is, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

XXXVII

DOFFER no criticism of the idea which obtains among simple and devout folk that "Give us this day our daily bread" is the one petition in the Lord's Prayer that has reference to an earthly boon. Surely it is wise of us to think of our earthly food as a gift from the Lord.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

But the heavenly man realises that "Man doth not live by bread alone," and that if he is to maintain his heavenliness in good working order, he must partake of meat that the man of the world knows not of. It is important for our bodily activity that we should be sufficiently supplied with bodily nourishment: but it is far more important that our souls should be sustained in righteousness and that we should be spiritually fed by him who is the Bread of Heaven and who has declared, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." We have only to mention the mental pabulum that is commonly served to the natural man to realise how impossible it is for him to succeed in a heavenly venture on such a diet. He is educated for "success," and not for heaven. He is fed on the gospel of "getting-on." Honesty is to be adopted as a mere policy, and morality is a matter of respectability. He is told to "play the game" in order to win respect and applause, and it is suggested that by doing so he will gain the confidence of his fellows and become rich. He is to learn all he can at school and college, and by other means, so that he may succeed in the struggle


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

for existence. He is to be useful for profit, always with an eye to the main chance. Always there is the appeal to native cupidity : the virtues of enlightened self-interest are extolled. Religion is regarded as social propriety, and it is even hinted that church-membership is a business asset. Truly enough, the man who is fed on such a diet of worldliness can have no power to stand on the side of the angels ! If he is to do the Heavenly Father's will on earth as it is done in heaven, he must seek an inspiration and a strength denied to him by the world. Well may he cry, " Give us this day our daily bread ! " And to find that bread he must turn to the Lord Jesus Christ : to the Book which tells of his life and teaches his Truth : to the volume which has been the main guide to godliness for nineteen centuries. He must meditate on ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty. He must learn how to love goodness for its own sake : to be honest, not because it pays, but because it is right ; to learn in order to be useful, not solely for worldly success. Contemplating and reverencing the " Name " of the Heavenly Father, the heavenliness in which He appears ; thinking on the kindness, goodwill, self-sacrificing service, large-hearted-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ness, and spirituality which are heaven itself, his prayer for bread is really the demand of his soul for the spirit and the life which will enable him to take into his earthly life the heavenly qualities which he reveres. And his prayer will not be an empty wail : it will be a vocal or inarticulate cry proceeding from the determination of his soul. He is engaged on an eager quest. He does not wait placidly for virtue to fall into his lap : he follows hard after the graces he desires. What he prays to be he tries to be.

XXXVIII

HE Biblical story of the emancipation of Israel, of the people's wanderings in the wilderness, and of their discovery and conquest of the promised land is a parable for all time. It indicates that he who would be a true son of God must emerge from materialism and worldliness and be emancipated from their tyranny. He must also pass through his wilderness in which his loyalty and ardour in the quest for the ideal are tested and often sore beset. He must obey implicitly the law of God as represented

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

by Moses, the lawgiver. Before he can be his own man, which really means being God's man, he must subdue his spiritual foes. As the land of Canaan was to be purged by the ejection of its occupants, so the mind of God's man must be cleansed by the subjugation of the evils which have so strong a hold upon it. In this remarkable and spiritually inexhaustible story, the worldly food failed Israel in the wilderness, just as we find that maxims of worldly prudence are no help to us when we are properly up against moral and spiritual tests. Then we need a more sublimated diet, and this is represented by the manna, the bread from heaven, which, at first, was strange to Israel, even as it is a new discovery to the spiritual pilgrim who has but recently set out on his pilgrimage. We wonder how we are to be fed when the fleshpots of Egypt have been left behind, and it is good for us to realise that God can nourish the soul with a higher good than is found in the ways of worldliness. Lest we should be in error in determining the real significance of the manna, it is elsewhere described as "angels' food." An angel is a messenger of God, one who has given himself to His service: we are angels, God's messengers, when we do His will; our

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

angelhood is supported by heavenly food, the delight in goodness and truth. So the manna supplied to Israel in the wilderness is an Old Testament portrayal of the heavenly food which is the "daily bread" of the Lord's Prayer.

XXXIX

EVERY word in the Lord's Prayer counts, and in our consideration of the petition before us we must not overlook the significance of the word "daily." Ordinarily, of course, we think on our daily bread as the food needed each day to keep the body in health and strength. We progress from day to day, and we ask for daily food for daily needs. But as spiritual beings our progress is not dependent on time. One might live to be a hundred years old, and yet remain a babe in wisdom; another might be greatly advanced spiritually and yet be young in years. "We count time by heart-beats, not by shadows on a dial." In the spiritual life we gauge advance, not by the clock, but by state of mind and heart. We go on from state to state, from strength to strength. The crises of the inner life are the matters

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

that count. We mark a forward bound by the new insights that change our outlook, by the victories won over the ever-insistent self. In the effort to realise the ideal, we encounter both joy and despair; we are assailed by doubts and endangered by indulgence in emotional delights. At one moment we see truth and are confident; at another our heavenly vision is blurred and hope goes down to zero. To uphold us through all our changing states, our spiritual fluctuations, we need heavenly support—our daily bread. We need the word that will help us to bear adversity, and that will keep our souls in integrity in the day of prosperity. Just the word, just the strength that will help us in our present spiritual state or mood—that is what we need. Especially do we need a heavenly spirit in the times of our outward prosperity, when it is so easy for us to drift into worldly ways. Few of us can “carry corn,” as the saying goes, and yet maintain our spiritual ideals. And there is a further significance of the word “daily.” We are not enjoined to ask for food for all time, to bestow in our granaries, but just for that which meets the demand of a day. Spiritually, this implies the good that will suit a certain condition of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

mind, the special aspect of truth that is divinely applicable to it. We need no more than we can use, and if we attempt to gather more than we can use it will lose its vitality, and become "flat, stale and unprofitable," even as the manna of Israel decayed if gathered in excess of the power of consumption.

XL

WE cannot fight the good fight with self-love and its attendant evils and errors, thus preparing a way for the descent of heavenliness into the activities of our natural lives, unless we are strengthened by the bread of heaven. This angels' food is given us to meet our spiritual requirements: it appears in response to spiritual aspiration, and its virtue and strength are felt by us as we shun evils as sins against God. The heavenly bread nourishes heavenly affection and moral determination. It keeps love alive, the love of the Lord and the love for our fellows. It feeds faith and increases charity, and we need a very large charity to enable us to fulfil the condition upon which our forgiveness depends. Men and women convicted of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

sin have always implored God for forgiveness : it is quite common for them to throw themselves into the arms of the Divine Mercy. But in seeking forgiveness they seldom remember that they are forgiven as they forgive. The perfection of the Lord's Prayer, as a Programme for Life, is further indicated in the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." This is no appeal for unconditional mercy : it is a recognition of the spiritual law elsewhere stated by the Lord, "With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." It becomes evident that our harmony with the Lord depends upon our neighbourliness, upon our goodwill to all mankind. We recall the injunction, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The Lord, in giving his Prayer, called special attention to this matter : indeed, it is the only petition in the Prayer which he seems to have felt it necessary to amplify. He said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." The matter must be of grave import to receive such emphasis.

XLI

IT might be claimed that one knows nothing of the life of heaven if he has not entered into the delight of forgiveness. The Lord contrasts ancient paganism and the Christian programme in the words, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." This is the Divine attitude towards all men, and it appears in the disposition of all whose love comprehends His love. The bread of heaven is given to keep such a love in healthy activity, to enable us to forgive even as we would be forgiven. Bitterness towards our fellows, resentment of real or supposed injuries, rancour and readiness to

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

take offence, the disposition to return evil for evil, all these inhibit the religious life and close the soul to the free activity of the Christ within. Reverently, and with a sense of our own insufficiency, we must adopt the Divine attitude to mankind. The Lord loves all in association with and through the agency of His supreme purpose, which is no less than the culture of heavenly character, which, in itself, is salvation. Our love to mankind should reflect the Lord's love and have definite reference to this great purpose. We are to love men, not because they are sinners, or because they are hostile to us, but for the reason that in every man there is a potential angel. While abominating evil in all its forms, we are to forget the wrong done us in our zeal for the salvation of the evildoer. Our forgiveness of others does not necessarily imply that we should release them from the penalty of wrongdoing, for so we might do them more harm than good ; but it does necessitate that any orderly penalty should be spiritually remedial and not mere punitive tit-for-tat.


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XLII

IF we are rightly to apprehend the petition in the Lord's Prayer which refers to forgiveness, we must rid our minds of conceptions which are commonly connected with the word "pardon." We are apt to think of pardon as the removal of penalty. No one rightly approaches the Lord for forgiveness if the chief thought in his mind is relief from the proper consequences of his misdeeds. A stout, virile manhood fears no lash and seeks no escape from the spiritual law which has it that as a man sows, so shall he reap. He who has done wrong and sincerely repents will gladly bear the consequences, cheerfully pay the bill. The pains that issue from sin, if the subject be truly penitent, assist the regenerative process. It is an abject soul that seeks unconditional pardon and escape from merited penalties: what is really needed is not pardon as commonly thought of but mastery of the inward evil which gives rise to sin. And it is this mastery that we ought to have in mind when we pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XLIII

UR finer appreciation of this petition depends upon our conception of forgiveness and knowledge of the Divine process involved in the term, and also upon the inwardness of the word "debts." How does the Lord forgive sin? Not, surely, by washing away sin's scars, for we know from experience that every sin leaves an indelible mark upon the soul. Nor does He achieve it by a purging process in which the possibility of sinning is entirely removed. A heavenly soul must remain a potential sinner or else lose all semblance of spiritual freedom. There is no virtue in goodness which is imposed and not freely chosen. An evil is forgiven when it is remitted, that is, sent back or controlled, brought to heel. In asking for forgiveness, far from seeking pardon, the spiritual aspirant looks for power from the Lord to control his lower nature, the nature which contracts debts, the nature which owes fealty to God and His Kingdom. For, after all, what debts do we owe to God? We owe Him love, reverence, faith, loyalty, service. We owe Him obedience to His laws. The least we

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

can do in response to His love and bounty to us is to give Him love for love and gratitude for mercies freely bestowed. But we repay what we owe to the Lord very imperfectly. Indeed, we can never pay the bill in full. And why is it that our debts are unpaid? The answer is easy. There is that in us which withholds payment. We are selfish and ignorant: self-love blinds us to the very existence of the Divine, and causes us to disregard the Lord's purpose of good towards us. We can never pay what we owe to the Lord until He holds the first place in our esteem and our self-love is subjugated. Therefore the true forgiveness of our debts involves the Divine control of the evils to which they are due. The which means, in brief terms, that we cannot yield the Lord the service due to Him until self is subdued, and that we cannot subdue self without His aid.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XLIV

DESPITE our failure to render to the Lord what we spiritually owe to Him, we have every assurance that He does not despise us on that account. He still regards us benignly. We continue to benefit by the impact of His gracious Spirit, and some day we may make a more perfect response to the power of His love. But it is impressed upon us in this most perfect of prayers that the evils within us that prevent us from yielding the gratitude and service which we owe to the Lord cannot be forgiven, or brought under control, until we are disposed towards others as the Lord is disposed to us. We, too, have our debtors. The love we extend to others ought to be reciprocated. Respect is due to fine character, and gratitude ought to be shown for kindness which we extend to our fellows. What child ever realises and shows full appreciation of the sacrifice of parents? And how often does the worldling value the practical goodwill of a religious person? The great majority of people utterly fail to realise, much less to feel gratitude for, the efforts made by the few for the sake of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

their moral and spiritual welfare. Very frequently we are tempted to cease caring for others when we meet with flagrant instances not only of thanklessness but also of abuse. We talk about casting pearls before swine, and are apt to conclude that our efforts are worse than useless. Now, while it is true that beneficiaries owe gratitude to benefactors, he who is animated by the true Christian spirit is satisfied to labour for the eternal good of others entirely regardless of thanks or any other form of recognition. Ours should be the attitude of the Lord Jesus who, while he mourned over unresponsive and recalcitrant Jerusalem, continued to labour for its salvation. The Lord's one regard for men is for the development of character in accordance with his grand purpose, and if we would be "perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect," this, too, must be our chief aim. When we meet with ingratitude and abuse, and when our love is scorned, we are not to angrily resent the wrong, but to continue in our prayer and our effort for the salvation of the wrong-doer. This is the forgiveness of our debtors.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

XLV

WHILE we are nursing resentment we are fostering an evil in ourselves that hinders the control of our self-love—hence our own spiritual welfare depends upon us forgetting what is due to ourselves. We benefit by the Lord's mercy, as we extend mercy: the spirit of mercy becomes more powerful as it is expressed. Well was it said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." In similar terms we may say we are forgiven even as we forgive. But we ought to think of our "debtors" in another and more interior aspect, if we are to detect the full import of the petition in regard to forgiveness. We have seen that it is self that is the real debtor to the Lord, and that it is self that is tardy in paying what it owes. We are forgiven when self is properly subordinated, controlled, and rendered serviceable to heavenly and Divine interests. But this forgiveness is assured only when, seemingly of our own strength, but really by Divine aid, we co-operate with the Lord in shunning the evils that animate the natural man. Our forgiveness of the debtor, self, is no lenient

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

pardon or negligent complacency. The aim is to reduce self to such condition that it will pay its debts, and this it will not do until it is absorbed by higher than mere worldly interests. All which means that the Lord will control our evil desires and thoughts just in so far as we, on our part, obey His commandments and resolutely shun evils as sins against Him, that is, as hindrances to the fuller realisation of the grand issues of His Providence. Thus we see that the prayer for forgiveness is no demand for unconditional mercy: it is fraught with the recognition of the fact that the Lord can do no good thing for us which we will not labour for ourselves and extend to others. Grace is given to those who are striving to be gracious.

XLVI

WHEN, in the development of the spiritual life, which is the truly human life, we strive, by the grace of God, to gain the mastery over self, which holds us back from yielding to the Lord the service we owe Him, we quickly make the discovery that ours can be no easy victory. The subtlety

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

and craft of self are beyond description : it parades in angelic guises and casts a glamour over evil. Unmasked in one of its alluring phases, it shortly appears in other forms. Passive and complacent while we make no effort to overthrow its dominion, it arrays all its cunning and its strength against the Divine forces that work within us when we shun evils as sins against God. Indeed, it is only when we begin to desire and work for the Father's Kingdom that we discover how terrible and insidious self can be. The careless selfishness of the superficial existence of human butterflies is a mild thing in comparison with the self-love which resists the development of the spiritual life, and it is in respect to spiritual life that self assumes so many cunning guises. And it may be said that in what passes as religion self wins its greatest achievements. It creates the great vice of the soul, spiritual pride—the I-am-holier-than-thou disposition. It engenders the demand for heavenly rewards. It fathers mock humility and hypocrisy. It fomented fanaticism and bigotry. It creates ecclesiastical craft and the inquisitorial spirit. Worst of all, it suggests doubts about the goodness of the Lord and the wisdom of His

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

Providence. It makes us ask ourselves whether the quest of the Kingdom is worth while. It is a case of action and reaction : as the life of the Kingdom within us becomes active, self becomes reactive, and the reaction of self causes what we describe as temptation. Self will not submit to the impact of the Divine Spirit without a fight, and the fight becomes evident in what is commonly called the inner conflict, the struggle for mastery between the best and the worst in us. Natural evils, such as those mentioned in the Ten Commandments, stand condemned by our ordinary moral conscience : often enough we abstain from them for fear of loss of gain or reputation. But we rise above their allurements when we become absorbed in spiritual interests and aware of spiritual law. Many persons are of such a disposition as to feel no particular temptation to murder, or steal, or commit adultery in the literal sense of the terms ; and many who have felt such temptation have conquered it. But the conquest is superficial, even as the temptation has been obvious. As a matter of fact, we can hardly know the subtlety of temptation arising from the craft and enmity of self, until we are subjected to its onslaughts against the beauti-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

ful life of the Kingdom. Then it is that temptation assumes a spiritual form. Natural temptation is aimed at morality, but spiritual temptation attacks spirituality: the one is associated with the ethical life and the other with the life of religion. It is spiritual temptation, the assault on the life of religion, which is implied in the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

XLVII

THESE words have caused much criticism, and not a little doubt and heart-burning. They seem to imply that God actually subjects man to temptation and delights in submitting him to tests. It is asked whether a God who leads into temptation is worthy of worship. Are there not sufficient difficulties in life for a man to face without others imposed upon him by God? Would a good earthly father expose his child to evil? To quieten each questioning, several variants of the petition have been suggested, but we see no reason why we should depart from the usual rendering. The words as they


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

stand are addressed to spiritual experience—to the manner in which things appear to the regenerating subject. They seem to be contradictory to the Fatherliness of God, because when we are in states of spiritual temptation it seems as if our very loyalty to the Father has brought us into a terrible pass. The words, indeed, represent our feeling as opposed to the actual truth, which is the Lord leads no one into temptation, but is always in the effort to deliver from evil. The petition as it stands is psychologically sound. He who essays the spiritual life will inevitably be tempted : temptation is a sign that Divine forces are active within him and are arousing the old devil, self. But always the appearance to the person tempted is that the Lord whom he is striving to love and obey has led him into a bitter conflict. This seeming has to be corrected by the teaching of truth : the tempted person has to remind himself that there would be no inner conflict if there were no inner evil to oppose the activity of the Kingdom. He has, moreover, to understand that the light and life of the Kingdom have disclosed evils that lurk in dark places of the soul and stimulated them to resistance. These evils would be an eternal source of

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

danger were they not revealed and overcome, and the temptation is mercifully permitted by the Lord because it is an experience essential to the perfection of the spiritual life. In brief, temptation is not imposed by God ; it is due to elements in our nature that are hostile to God.


XLVIII

O the sentence, "Lead us not into temptation," represents the truth as it appears to the tempted person and not as it is in itself. It is comparable with the statement which prefaces the account of the temptation of Jesus : "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." At a cursory reading it would seem as if here, too, temptation was distinctly imposed by the Spirit : but the statement has it that Jesus was "led up." To be led up is to be raised into spiritual life : the Spirit uplifts us ; it does not "let us down." The temptation arises from subtle forces that are opposed to such upliftment, that would, indeed, drag us to their own hellish level. One of the three great tempta-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

tions of Jesus was to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, that is, from the height of spiritual and Divine attainment. Self strives to bring the aspiring soul to earth and to corrupt it with its mire. One of its most subtle onslaughts is the insistent suggestion that we are creatures of earth with natural passions and desires which it is orderly for us to indulge ; that the spiritual life is an unrealisable dream ; and even that it is possible for us to keep ourselves clean by the strength of our own will, without thought of God and dreams of eternal life. The assault is on the validity of our aspirations : the attempt is to make them appear unnatural, foolish, and badly founded.

XLIX

HE spiritual temptations that assault the spiritual pilgrim are aptly represented by the reactionary moods of the Children of Israel in the wilderness. The story of the Exodus, indeed, is a portrayal for all time of the inner experiences associated with our emancipation from the tyranny of the worldly life, with its selfishness and

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

materialism, and our search for the Kingdom of God under the guidance of His Word. So soon as we have made a definite step towards liberty, we are pursued, not by Egyptians, but by worldly thoughts and desires which claim us for their own. We seem to be faced with impassable barriers, as were the Israelites at the Red Sea, and again at Jordan: the way of escape is barred by unanticipated difficulties. We have to "stand still and see the salvation of God" before we are convinced that emancipation is possible. And even when some progress has been made we remember with longing the fleshpots of Egypt, and wonder whether the delights of the new life are an adequate exchange for the pleasures of the old. Our souls are hungry, and the bread of life, the heavenly manna, is supplied: but self-love induces nausea and discontent. The water of life is freely given, but a certain bitterness within us renders it unpalatable. The journey is a roundabout one; we despair of reaching our objective. There are times when our leader seems to be lost in the heights, as when Moses was on Sinai, and when we come to earth and worship the golden calf. More subtle is the suggestion that while the promised land is fair and desirable, it is over-

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

run by giants, held from our possession by evils too big to overcome. The old suggestion that the ideal is beautiful but unattainable ; that the laws of the Sermon on the Mount are perfect but impracticable ! All temptation so soon as we have broken with the old life is an assault on the new. We have escaped from the tyranny of external evils only to discover that there are others more subtle and profound. Now the attack is directed against our faith, our ideals, our loyalty to the Lord, our spiritual courage, and our goodwill to our fellow-pilgrims. Why should we forgive our debtors when they are so thankless ? As the old gamblers used to say, " Is the game worth the candle ? " Often enough we are led to cry, " Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

L

FORTUNATELY our trials come singly and not in battalions. We are never permitted to be tempted beyond endurance. God shows us a way through the seemingly impassable barrier and protects us by the angel of His presence. We discover


A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

desirable resting-places and are reinvigorated. We are shown that the bitter draught may be rendered sweet by obedience to the law of the Lord, and we never completely lose sight of the ideal: it goes before us as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And when we realise that temptation is evidence of intense Divine activity in the soul, we are greatly comforted. The man who experiences no spiritual temptations is not spiritually alive. And, in the matter of temptation, we ought to note particularly that the petition in the Lord's Prayer concerning it immediately follows the reference to the forgiveness of debtors. It is when we come into vital application of Christian principles in relation to ourselves and others, and are up against "the foes of our own household" and the cruel criticism and scorn of those we try most to benefit, that we are subject to a sense of injury and feel bitter resentment. The temptation is to give up the effort and to give tit-for-tat. Our difficulty is less with evils in others than with our own bitter and rebellious spirit. But the temptation is allowed so that in overcoming it we may develop strength of Christian character and gain confidence in the leading of the Lord. The end of it all is

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

deliverance from evil by the Great Deliverer, and, sure enough, we cannot be delivered from any evil that has no appeal to us and which we have not courageously faced.

LI

HE Lord's Prayer commences with the recognition of God as the Father in the heavens. This is followed by reverence for all good and truth in which He is revealed. Reverence gives rise to aspiration; to the desire that Love may establish its dominion in our hearts and minds. Then follows the realisation that the will of the Father must be obeyed in life as well as sentiment. We are reminded that the will cannot be done by us unless we are strengthened by heavenly food. Then we learn that we cannot be at one with the Father unless we are reconciled to our brother. Finally, it is impressed upon us that we must meet the evils that oppose Christian character, and grow strong by conquest. The Prayer ends with deliverance from evil, not by our own might, but by the power of God.

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

That is the ultimate issue of the Christian life—deliverance from the power of evil, and entering into the true captaincy of the soul. Regarded from the Divine aspect, we detect the impact of the Divine Spirit upon the soul of man effecting, first recognition, then reverence, then aspiration, then the will to obey. We see it feeding the soul with its own strength and impelling it to a right disposition towards others; and then we witness the hostility of evil and the consequent inner conflict, and the issue of the battle in the deliverance from evil and the victory of God through which the soul is won for heavenly service. The Prayer is usually ended with the ascription, "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever." This seems to be no part of the original prayer, but it serves very beautifully as an acknowledgment by man of the victory of the Lord, and the recognition that we are saved by the grace of God.

" He leads Israel out of Egypt ;
He makes ev'ry raw nature ripe ;
He puts idols out of the sanctuary . . .
Heart-strings give forth music at His Touch ;
He teaches age the melody of youth."

A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and truth’s sake.” The Lord’s Prayer truly is a whole body of theology, an outline of man’s spiritual experience—a Programme for Life.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CONQUEST OF CARE. Uniform with "A Programme for Life." Price, cloth, 2s. net; art paper cover, 1s. net. (Size $6\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$.)

"Simply packed with good things."—*Science of Thought Review*.

"Mr Hall's charming little book is one that justifies its title to an unusual extent. . . . He is a writer for whom we give thanks."—*New-Church Magazine*.

"Whole volumes of theology might be better spared from our shelves than this unpretentious book. . . . An admirable and safe tonic for jaded nerves and depressing thoughts."—*New-Church Herald*.

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS. Cloth, 2s. 6d. net. (Size $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5$.)

"Mr Hall reveals himself in words which continually betray an unusual insight into and a sympathy for the problems of personal religious adjustment."—*New-Church Messenger*.

"Makes a direct appeal as a clear and simple, and better still, an affectionate presentment of some of the fundamental truths of religion . . . the harbinger of that new form of appeal to the heart as well as the head."—*New-Church Magazine*.

"A book of friendly and charming discussion. . . . Friendly talk on the highest subjects, buoyant and graceful."—*New-Church Review*.

"Pleasingly written. . . . We find in it all the graces of literary art."—*New-Church Life*.

"We owe a debt of gratitude to Mr Hall for so fine a contribution to our bookshelves."—*New-Church Magazine*.

"This is the kind of book more of which we should like to see at the disposal of the Church."—*New Age (Australia)*.

THE ART OF BEING HAPPY. Art paper cover, 1s. (Size $6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$.)

"Written in terse, well-chosen language. Sustained by independent thinking. There are earnest men and women who will find it out."—*Expository Times*.

"A dainty little volume, fresh and felicitous."—*Aberdeen Free Press*.

LONDON: THE NEW-CHURCH PRESS, LTD.

20 HART STREET, W.C.1



